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„O, A CHERUBIN THOU WAST THAT DID PRESERVE ME!" THE MOTIF OF A WOMAN REDEMPTRIX IN SHAKESPEARE'S *PERICLES*, *CYMBELINE* AND *THE WINTER'S TALE*

Abstract

In Shakespeare's tragedies, death is an insurmountable barrier, whereas in his romances, which move from tragedy towards reunion and reconciliation, resurrections are frequent. Thus, death in the romances is overcome by the resurrection of the redemptive daughter, mother and wife figures. This paper examines how Shakespeare's romances repeatedly overcome death through the resurrection of female characters. The Virgin herself was a very popular figure in the Middle Ages and the early modern period, permeating not only people's everyday lives but literature as well. Marina and Thaisa in *Pericles*, Imogen in *Cymbeline*, and Hermione and Perdita in *The Winter's Tale* emulate the Virgin in their redemptive potential which enables them to redeem their erring husbands and fathers and bring desired equilibrium to the romances.

Keywords: Shakespeare; death; resurrection; redemption; Virgin Mother

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„O, KERUBIN TI BIJAŠE ŠTO ME SAČUVA!" MOTIV ŽENE OTKUPITELJICE U SHAKESPEAREOVIM DRAMAMA *PERIKLE*, *CIMBELIN* I *ZIMSKA PRIČA*

Sažetak

U Shakespearovim tragedijama smrt se shvaća kao nepremostiva prepreka. U njegovim romansama, koje predstavljaju tematski pomak od tragedija k pomirenju i ujedinjenju, motivi uskrsnuća česti su. Smrt u romansama stoga je prevladavana čestim uskrsnućima, i to u likovima kćeriju, majki i supruga, koje posjeduju moć otkupljenja. Ovaj rad istražuje način na koji Shakespearove romanse uzastopno prevladavaju smrt kroz uskrsnuća koja omogućuju ženski likovi. Ovi likovi u sebi ujedinjuju otkupljujući potencijal majke, žene i kćeri, nalik onom Djevice Majke. Sama Djevica bila je vrlo popularna figura u srednjemu vijeku i renesansi te je kao takva prožimala svakodnevni život običnih ljudi, ali i tadašnju književnost. Marina i Thaisa u *Periklu*, Imogen u *Cymbelinu* te Hermione i Perdita u *Zimskoj priči* oponašaju Djevicu, i to prvenstveno kroz otkupljenja svojih grešnih muževa i očeva te tako donose željenu ravnotežu u romanse.

Ključne riječi: Shakespeare; smrt; uskrsnuće; otkupljenje; Djevica Majka

Introduction

In the introduction to the Arden edition of *The Winter's Tale*, John Pitcher states that "the need to believe in the truly impossible (life after death) and to take consolation and even pleasure from it, is part of our humanity" (as cited in Burnette, 2016, p. 443). However, we are aware that "in this life, death simply cannot be overcome" (Benson, 2009, p. 13). In the inverted pietá scene at the end of *King Lear*, Shakespeare's last tragedy, Lear fears that Cordelia is dead. In his desperation, he asks for a looking glass: "Lend me a looking glass; / If that her breath will mist or stain the stone, / Why, then she lives" (Shakespeare 1608/1996b, 5.3.263–265). He even believes he sees a feather stirring: "This feather stirs; she lives! If it be so, / It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows / That ever I have felt" (Shakespeare 1608/1996b, 5.3.269–271). Sean Benson (2009) terms what happens at the end of *King Lear* a "failed resurrection" (p. 18). *Lear* is perhaps the most notable of the failed resurrections, even though they are also present in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*. The nature of tragedy simply does not allow for a hopeful ending. However, in the romances, which move from tragedy towards reconciliation and reunion, resurrections are a staple element of the genre. Moreover, resurrection becomes an essential motif which leads to the protagonist's redemption through the medium of femininity, i.e. through the redemptive potential of a woman (a mother, daughter and/or wife). This paper argues that Marina and Thaisa from *Pericles*, Imogen from *Cymbeline*, and Perdita and Hermione from *The Winter's Tale* – mothers, wives and/or daughters – embody the virginal qualities of chastity, patience and obedience and, most importantly, forgiveness, and as such have the ability to redeem the erring male protagonists through their resurrections.

In his lectures on the nature of tragedy and comedy, Northrop Frye (1967) notes that death is essential to tragedy and the tragic protagonist whom it defines, giving "to the individual life a parabola shape, rising from birth to maturity and sinking again, and this parabola movement of rise and fall is also the typical shape of tragedy" (p. 3). Unlike tragedy,

comedy (a term Frye uses to refer to plays such as *The Winter's Tale*, *Twelfth Night*, *A Midsummer's Night Dream*) "is based on the second half of the great cycle, moving from death to rebirth, decadence to renewal, winter to spring, darkness to a new dawn" (Frye, 1965, p. 121). Thus, death is inevitable in the tragedies, but "it is 'only in romance [that] the illusion of overcoming death [is] treated with the respect it deserves" (Burnette, 2016, p. 443). Benson (2009) similarly notes that "the sense of a resurrection or quasi-resurrection having taken place is a recurrent motif in Shakespeare's comedies and romances, while the countervailing frustration of a failed resurrection is a prominent feature of his tragedies" (p. 2).

The Cambridge Dictionary defines "resurrection" as the "act of bringing something that had disappeared or ended back into use or existence," and more specifically, "The Resurrection" as "Jesus Christ's return to life on the third day after this death, or the return of all people to life at the end of the world" (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). To Shakespeare, the Bible was by far the most important source: "Shakespeare cites the Bible thousands of times, far outdistancing his use of any other source" (Benson, 2009, p. 25). However, even though Shakespeare may have been inspired by Christ's resurrection, he was limited in what he could stage, and "repeatedly in his tragedies, comedies, and romances, Shakespeare gestures towards the Resurrection even as he adapts it in the form of quasi resurrections" (Benson, 2009, pp. 2–3). This would have been a direct violation of the 1606 "Act to Restrain Abuses of Players," which forbade the use of any holy names in vain. What Shakespeare used instead are "tropes and figurations of resurrection to suggest" that the reunions of characters believed dead "offer theatrical equivalents of the Resurrection" called "quasi-resurrections" (Benson, 2009, p. 2). Benson (2009) argues that these quasi-resurrections predate the Christian world and can be found in the classical comedy and romance convention the *anagnorisis* ("recognition" or "discovery"). Characters who had been separated through various means, such as shipwreck or abduction, rediscover each other and reunite in the end. Shakespeare

frequently used a variation of this convention, i.e. a situation in which a lost character is presumed dead and then

when the characters reunite, one of the initial reactions – so strong is the belief that the lost person died – is that he or she has been miraculously resurrected from the dead; what really happened, they may later learn, was merely a separation and subsequent but false presumption of death. (Benson, 2009, p. 15)

The pattern of quasi-resurrections recurs in Shakespeare's romances not only with the female characters experiencing mock deaths and then quasi-resurrections, but also with male characters such as Pericles, Cymbeline and Leontes, who undergo death-like states such as depression, asymbolia or catatonia. Although erring, their redemptions and resurrections are made possible by their female redemptrices who are chaste, patient, obedient and forgiving.

An inspiration for such a character is also found in the Bible, in the character of the Virgin Mary for whom "St. Ambrose says, 'was such that her life alone was model for all'" (Liguori, 1931, p. 546) and for whom the eternal father had envisioned "to be the repairer of the lost world, and the mediatress of peace between men and God" (Liguori, 1931, p. 288). Mary is, first of all, a paragon of chastity. St. Alphonsus de Liguori (1931) cites the blessed Albertus Magnus, who says that "'with reason (...) is Mary called the Virgin of virgins; for she, without the counsel or example of others, was the first who offered her virginity to God.' Thus did she bring all virgins who imitate her to God" (p. 571). Secondly, Mary is obedient and by being obedient, she is repairing Eve's disobedience. As de Liguori (1931) says, "Mary's obedience was much more perfect than that of all other saints; since all men, on account of original sin, are prone to evil, and find it difficult to do good, but not so the Blessed Virgin" (p. 579). She is exempt of the Original Sin. Thirdly, Mary is the Queen of Mercy, i.e. forgiveness. When compared to earthly kings, her mercy far exceeds theirs: "it is, however, not thus with Mary, who, although a Queen, is not queen of justice, intent on the punishment of the wicked, but a queen of mercy, intent only on commiserating

and pardoning sinners" (Liguori, 1931, p. 37). Finally, she is humble and meek, humility being the foundation of all the other virtues.

The Virgin Mother from the Bible to Shakespeare's Romances

In the Gospels, however, "the amount of historical information about the Virgin is negligible" (Warner, 2013, p. 14). More details can be found in the Apocrypha, which tell of Mary's birth, her maturation, her marriage to Joseph, and her giving birth to Jesus as well as her role in Jesus's miracles (Warner, 2013, pp. 26–34). Mary was exemplified as a paragon of virginity to all women by the Council of Nicaea in 325: "the Lord looked upon the whole of creation, and he saw no-one to equal Mary. Therefore, he chose her for his mother. If therefore a girl wants to be called a virgin, she should resemble Mary" (Warner, 2013, p. 70).

The figure of the Virgin Mary/Mother was profoundly and pervasively influential during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Her many and diversified roles made her an appealing persona to everyone, especially to women: "Mary appealed to women religious through the many roles she endorsed and amplified: daughter, mother, bride and kinswoman: she attracted male religious as comforting companion, the mother lost, the hope for inner perfection" (Rubin, 2009, p. 345). Mary was so omnipresent that

the images and statues of Mary in churches, on the outer walls of houses and at street corners all contributed to a reassuring sense of her presence. Around 1450 Italian cities began to decree that images of Mary be installed in street corners, to ensure better behavior by citizens in the public domain. People were obliged to behave accordingly as they were taught from childhood that the mother figure *par excellence* was always nearby. (Rubin, 2009, p. 341)

According to Waller (2011), "when ordinary late medieval men and women prayed, they usually prayed to the Virgin" (p. 31), which speaks in favour of Mary's popularity. Her figure was an inseparable part of people's lives and was as popular in medieval literature as in real life.

Miri Rubin (2009) refers to this phenomenon as "Marianization" (p. 177). This changed, however, in the early Modern period when Henry VIII broke with Rome and passed the Act of Supremacy in 1534. Besides England's brief return to Roman Catholicism during the reign of Mary I, the official religion in Elizabethan and Jacobean England was Protestantism, and during these periods, the Virgin became a marginal figure in line with Protestant ideology. Yet, figurations of the Virgin Mary remained present in the drama of the time in the female characters who are the epitome of chastity, forgiveness, patience and obedience. Despite her marginalisation, the Virgin appears to have been subtextually and subculturally present in English society.

James I passed the "Act to Restrain Abuses of Players" on 27 May 1606 in an effort to rule out vices on the stage and to discourage preachers from attacking the theatre, allowing it thus to survive (see Guardamagna, 2024, p. 26).The Act prohibited actors or any person on stage from "jestingly or profanely speak[ing] or use[ing] the holy Name of God, or of Christ Jesus, or the Holy Ghost, or of the Trinity, which are not to be spoken but with Fear and Reverence" (Guardamagna, 2024, p. 24). Any person who used God's name in vain would "forfeit for every such Offence by him or them committed Ten Pounds" (Guardamagna, 2024, p. 24). In order to bypass the censorship, Shakespeare and other contemporary playwrights substituted classical deities for the Holy Trinity, and if the evidence is considered from plays for which several versions exist, oaths such as "swounds/zounds" and "sblood" were omitted from the First Folio of 1623 (Guardamagna, 2024; Munro, 2017). A milder oath that survived censorship was "marry," a corruption of the name of the Virgin Mary, which was used as an interjection to express "surprise, astonishment, outrage, etc., or … to give emphasis to one's words, often in response to a question, expressing surprise that it should be asked" (Chang, 2016). Thus, unlike other, stronger oaths, "marry" appears not to have been expunged by the authors of the First Folio.

In Shakespeare's plays, Mary's virginal qualities go hand in hand with Shakespeare's use of "one of the great stories of Western culture, the desire to overcome death," a motif often associated "with a redemptive

woman figure" (Waller, 2011, p. 165). Moreover, many accounts of Mary's miracles … attributed the raising of the dead to her. In Shakespeare's plays of redemption through female figures, it is as if a medieval Madonna has been transformed and reintegrated into popular culture, no longer explicitly associated with the Virgin as one of her "madonnine" images, but humanized, embodying a more fragile but concrete humanity. (Waller, 2011, p. 165)

Pericles

In *Pericles*, Shakespeare's first romance, two female characters function as redemptrices. This proves vital for the play which has death at its core. Its opening scene alludes to death although it seems to be completely the opposite. This scene looks somewhat naïve even though "the cost of failure" of not solving the riddle "is graphically depicted by a gruesome row of severed heads: the remains of previous contenders in this risky enterprise" (Nevo, 1987, p. 65). Pericles tries to win the hand of king Antiochus's beautiful daughter, who is praised by both her father for her alleged virtues and by Pericles for her beauty. She is "apparel'd like the spring" (Shakespeare, 1609/1996c, 1.1.12),

> *her face the book of praises, where is read*
> *Nothing but curious Pleasures, as from thence*
> *Sorrow were ever razed, and testy wrath*
> *Could never be her mild companion. (Shakespeare, 1609/1996c, 1.1.15–18)*

However, this scene is, as William Barry Thorne (1969) suggests, "deliberately deceptive" (p. 46). What seems to be a scene of innocent courting turns into a scene of gross violation of nature and family roles. The riddle – "He's father, son, and husband mild: / I mother, wife, and yet his child" (Shakespeare, 1609/1996c, 1.1.68–69) – uncovers incest. Thus,

the play begins with a striking contrast between the bareness of death in the riddle scene and the spring imagery used to describe the daughter of Antiochus. The opening scene sets up immediately the pageant

opposition between life and death, summer and winter. (Thorne, 1969, p. 49)

These oppositions continue throughout the play. More importantly to our analysis, the incestuous daughter, who embodies the sterility and coldness of Death, also threatens and brings into question the possibility of resurrection in the continuation of the play. Her intention is hidden in the riddle:

> *I am no viper, yet I feed*
> *On mother's flesh, which did me breed*
> *I sought a husband, in which labour*
> *I found that kindness in a father. (Shakespeare, 1609/1996c, 1.1.64–67)*

She usurps the place of her absent mother and violates it, but she also violates the roles of wife and daughter. However, the overall intention of the play is to defeat death: "birth and regeneration round out the familiar concepts of repentance and penance, and pageant figures personify youth and age and the spiritual regeneration which assures that 'death shall have no dominion'" (Thorne, 1969, p. 48). This will be accomplished through the figures of the women redeemers, Marina and Thaisa respectively.

Pericles is, indeed, a man whose ordeals seem to be completely undeserved. Hannibal Hamlin (2018) compares him to the biblical character of Job: "Pericles (like Job) seems to have done nothing for which he might reasonably be punished" (p. 144). Pericles uncovers Antiochus's incest, has to flee his kingdom, saves the people of Tarsus from famine, and then survives his first shipwreck after which he wins the hand of the beautiful Thaisa. On his way home, he experiences his second shipwreck in which his wife, after having given birth to their daughter, dies. Pericles "hastily accedes to the demands of the sailors for whom this woman on board is taboo, failing to realize that Thaisa is still sufficiently alive to be revived by Cerimon many hours later" (Dreher, 1986, p. 148). He throws her body into the sea and leaves his daughter in Tarsus. However, the most severe blow for Pericles is when he is told about

Marina's death. He is "in sorrow all devour'd," "swears / Never to wash his face, nor cut his hairs: / He puts on sackcloth, and to sea" (Shakespeare, 1609/1996c,4.3. 82, 84–86). The state that Pericles is in might be termed catatonia, depression or, as Julia Kristeva (1987) would say, asymbolia, i.e. the loss of meaning (p. 42). It might also be termed a "mock death" (Thorne, 1969, p. 48). When, in the final Act, Helicanus introduces himself and Pericles to Lysimachus, he says that Pericles is "a man who for this three months hath not spoken / To any one, nor taken sustenance / But to prorogue his grief" (Shakespeare, 1609/1996c, 5.1.23–25). When Lysimachus asks to see him, Helicanus answers, "You may; / But bootless is your sight, – he will not speak / To any" (Shakespeare, 1609/1996c, 5.1.31–33). When Marina first sings to him, Pericles does not hear her. Not until she speaks to him and equates her suffering with his, does he react.

His salvation is rendered possible by Marina's redeeming, virginal qualities. Firstly, she is depicted as sheer perfection by other characters. Gower reports that she is "both the heart and place / Of general wonder" (Shakespeare, 1609/1996c, 4. Ch. 10–11) and Leonine says that she is "a goodly creature" (Shakespeare, 1609/1996c,4.1.9). Secondly, she is such a ferocious defender of her chastity that at the very beginning of Act 5, when Marina is placed in the brothel, Bawd and Boult discuss how to get rid of her (Shakespeare, 1609/1996c, 5.4.12–13) because she is jeopardising their trade. Thorne (1969) interprets Marina's "release from the brothel where pirates placed her" as "a *renouveau*, as is her effect upon the sorrowing King, who awakens to her celestial music and later is able to hear the music of the spheres" (p. 45).

Marina's virginal attributes are subtextual as well. According to Ruben Espinosa (2011), the name Marina is reminiscent of "the popular Marian title, *Stella Maris* or Star of the Sea" (p. 162), but she is also associated with a comet: "I am a maid, / My lord, that ne'er before invited eyes, / But have been gazed on like a comet" (Shakespeare, 1609/1996c, 5.1.86–88) which again "reaffirms her association with the Virgin Mary's title as 'Star of the Sea'" (Espinosa, 2011, p. 164). Marina is able to redeem and resurrect her father from the state of mock death, and the

whole final Act is devoted to this idea. After recognising Marina as his daughter, Pericles is restored to life, a fact most obvious in his speech (Shakespeare, 1609/1996c, 5.1.220–222). After his episode of depression, he hears "the music of the spheres" (Shakespeare, 1609/1996c, 5.1.228) – "solemn music, as always in Shakespeare, engenders a mood of relaxed and enraptured oral receptivity ('If music be the food of love, play on')" (Schwartz, 1970, p. 272).

However, Pericles's "resurrection" is complete only after he re-encounters his wife in a recognition scene that takes up the entire final Act (Shakespeare 1609/1996c, 5.2.1-104). As it has previously been noted, Shakespeare employs a variation of the recognition element in which the stronger the presumption of a character's death is, the more intense the joy of the final reunion is. Thus, both Thaisa and Pericles are conventionally overjoyed at the prospect of meeting each other, a fact obvious in their speech:

> *THAISA. – O, my lord,*
> *Are you not Pericles? Like him you speak,*
> *Like him you are: did you not name a tempest,*
> *A birth, and death?*
> *PERICLES. The voice of dead Thaisa! (Shakespeare, 1609/1996c, 5.2.29-33)*

Before the spouses reunite with their daughter, Pericles thanks the gods:

> *This, this: no more, you gods! your present kindness,*
> *Makes my past miseries sport: you shall do well,*
> *That on the touching of her lips I may*
> *Melt, and no more be seen. – O, come, be buried*
> *A second time within these arms" (Shakespeare, 1609 /1996c, 5.2.40-44).*

Cymbeline

Like *Pericles*, *Cymbeline* manifests a similar desire for a world redeemed, which is especially prominent in the play's reference to "lopt branches" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996a, 5.5.438). At the very end of the play, the Soothsayer alludes to Cymbeline's lost children and their rediscovery:

> *when from a stately*
> *cedar shall be lopt branches, which, being dead*
> *many years, shall after revive, be jointed to the*
> *old stock, and freshly grow. (Shakespeare,*
> *1623/1996a, 5.5. 437–440)*

More generally, the Soothsayer is alluding to death (mock death) and revival (resurrection and redemption), announcing a period of prosperity after a period of crisis ("then shall Posthumus / end his miseries, Britain be fortunate, and flourish / in peace and plenty" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996a, 5.5.440–442). As Ruth Nevo (1987) notes,

The play has been inundated by fantasies of dispersed and reassembled families, parents, siblings, marriage, partners; of split and recuperated identities, of "lopp'd branches," which, being dead many years, shall after revive, be jointed to the old stock, and freshly grow (438-40). Implicit in all these has been an urgent will to transform the forces making for death and dissolution into a reaffirmation of procreative life. (p. 92)

Just like *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline* denotes the movement from winter (symbolising death and misfortunes) to spring (symbolising renewal, resurrection and redemption). Reflecting on *Cymbeline's* similarity to Shakespeare's other plays, W. B. Thorne (1969) notes that "like the bulk of Shakesperian comedies, *Cymbeline* begins in trouble and ends in joy" (p. 147), designating Cymbeline as "the heavy father" (p. 147) who forbids his daughter's marriage. What Thorne (1969) also notices is the presence of the "winter-summer imagery of the early comedies" (p. 147), whose opposition is best condensed in Imogen's remark:

> *… or ere I could*
> *Give him that parting kiss, which I had set*
> *Betwixt two charming words, comes in my father,*
> *And like the tyrannous breathing of the north,*
> *Shakes all our buds from growing. (Shakespeare, 1623/1996a,1.3.34–37)*

A parallel can be drawn here with *Pericles*, which also begins with a similar opposition between death and spring. Just like the incestuous Antiochus and his daughter, Cymbeline "is immediately aligned on the side of 'anti-fertility,' for he is ignoring the dictates of the season and has imposed his 'law' upon the young people" (Thorne, 1969, p. 147). Fortunately, because of the romance conventions and Imogen's redeeming potential, Cymbeline, her father, will be saved by her virginal qualities.

Unlike *Pericles*, in which Marina's and Thaisa's virginal qualities are somewhat compressed in the final acts (Acts 4 and 5, respectively), in *Cymbeline*, Imogen's role as the Virgin daughter, wife and mother is very clear from the beginning. According to Nevo (1987),

Cymbeline is the last of the plays to make a bold young woman, rather than her father, its main protagonist. In that respect Imogen is more akin to the independent daughters of the earlier courtship comedies than to the thaumaturgic daughters of the three late plays. (p. 63)

Furthermore, "she is what one might call a post-tragic heroine, abused, vilified, hunted, and not in possession of crucial knowledge" (Nevo, 1987, p. 64).

In the first part of the play, Imogen is portrayed as a suffering daughter. This is particularly made evident by the Second Lord in an aside, in which he mourns Imogen as an orphan, as hated by her stepmother and doubted by her husband (Shakespeare, 1623/1996a, 2.1.54–63). His remarks function as a short overview of Imogen's ill family fate, which she overcomes with Virgin-like endurance, chastity and obedience. Posthumus, her husband, and Iachimo, her would-be rapist, are the first to accentuate her chastity, her Virgin-like quality. Posthumus says: "She holds her virtue still, and I in my mind" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996a,

1.4.64) whereas in an aside, Iachimo says: "All of her is out of door most rich! / If she be furnish'd with a mind so rare, / She is alone the Arabian bird" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996a, 1.6.16–18). However, even though her chastity is questioned later by Posthumus and defamed by Iachimo, it is also eagerly defended by Pisanio: "She's punish'd for her truth; and undergoes, / More goddess-like than wife-like, such assaults / As would take in some virtue" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996a, 3.2.7–9).

In the second part of the play, which is set in the pastoral landscape of Wales, Imogen becomes a virginal mother. Wales itself is a metonymy for the mother: "it is a retreat from maturation, a return to infancy, or even beyond, to the shelter of a cave/womb" (Nevo, 1987, p. 84). Imogen's motherly connotations are quite straightforward in this setting. Even though she cross-dresses and pretends to be the boy Fidele, Guiderius and Arviragus, her long lost brothers, "associate her in 'death' with their lost mother" (Schwartz, 1970, p. 258). Thus, while alive, she replaces Belarius, their mother-father figure, and when dead, she is buried next to their nurse-mother Euriphile:

ARVIRAGUS. Say, where shall's lay him?

GUIDERIUS. By good Euriphile, our mother. (Shakespeare, 1623/1996a, 4.2.234–235)

Imogen's funeral reminds us of Pericles's ritualistic embalming of Thaisa's body and Cerimon's description of opening the coffin. Belarius and the boys are overcome with grief. Arviragus says,

> *The bird is dead*
> *That we have made so much on. I had rather*
> *Have skipt from sixteen years of age to sixty,*
> *To have turn'd my leaping-time into a crutch,*
> *Than have seen this. (Shakespeare, 1623/1996a,*
> *4.2.199–203)*

Belarius calls Imogen: "Thou blessed thing!" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996a, 4.2.209) and "a most rare boy" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996a, 4.2.210). Guiderius associates her with the "sweetest, fairest lily!" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996a, 4.2.204), a flower associated with the Virgin as early as the 7th century. "The Venerable Bede (AD 672/3–735) compared the

Virgin Mary with a white lily, the petals symbolising her pure body and the golden anthers the radiance of her soul. St Bernard (AD 1090–1153) described Mary as 'the violet of humility, the lily of chastity, the rose of charity'" (Dorrell, 2025). Furthermore, due to her purity, the Holy Ghost depicts Mary to be as beautiful as a turtle-dove and "for the same reason, she was also called a lily: *As the lily among the thorns, so is my love among the daughters*" (Liguori, 1931, p. 572). Imogen is referred to as a lily after her mock-death. Her two brothers, Arviragus and Guiderius, "lament her as a dead bird, a lily blasted; images of summer flowers and fairies fill the dialogue at this point, as the Princes determine to keep fresh her memory" (Thorne, 1969, p. 156).

The lamentation is followed by a ritual song, i.e. a dirge that the brothers are unable to sing due to their grief and decide to recite it (Shakespeare, 1623/1996a, 4.2.231–235). The dirge captures the victoriousness of death over life's – now meaningless – needs and rituals. Death conquers and trivialises life.

> *GUIDERIUS. Fear no more the heat o'the sun,*
> *Nor the furious winter's rages;*
> *Thou thy worldly task hast done,*
> *Home art gone, and ta'en thy wages:*
> *Golden lads and girls all must,*
> *As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.*
> *ARVIRAGUS. Fear no more the frown o'the great,*
> *Thou art past the tyrant's stroke;*
> *Care no more to clothe and eat;*
> *To thee the reed is as the oak;*
> *The scepter, learning, physic, must*
> *All follow this, and come to dust.*
> *GUIDERIUS. Fear no more the lightning-flash,*
> *ARVIRAGUS. Nor the'all-dreaded thunder-stone;*
> *GUIDERIUS. Fear not slander, censure rash;*
> *ARVIRAGUS. Thou hast finish joy and moan:*
> *BOTH. All lovers young, all lovers must,*
> *Consign to thee, and come to dust. (Shakespeare, 1623/1996a, 4.2.257–275)*

Imogen's full redeeming potential is accomplished in the final, recognition scene. After recognising Imogen as his daughter, Cymbeline, in a manner similar to Pericles, asks Imogen: "How now, my flesh, my child! / What, makest thou me a dullard in this act? / Wilt thou not speak to me?" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996a, 5.5.260–262). In the manner of a Virgin, Imogen submissively asks for Cymbeline's blessing and kneels. Cymbeline bitterly repents his former actions and acknowledges Imogen's sanctity. Cymbeline longs to be heard (understood, forgiven) by his daughter, and when he finally is, Imogen's very brief response and her kneeling before him signal that Cymbeline has been redeemed and she is his redemptrix.

The Winter's Tale

In comparison to *Pericles* and *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* is perhaps the play that is most connected to the topic of death as its solstitial title reveals. Frye has characterised *The Winter's Tale* as one of the comedies "that expresses the cyclical imagery of comedy most clearly" (1965, p. 121) referring to the movement from death to rebirth, winter to spring, etc. Amy K. Burnette (2016) has similarly noted that the deep connection of *The Winter's Tale* to the topic of death is hidden in the play's title:

> contextual references to "winter," "tale," and "winter's tale" elucidate what *The Winter's Tale* reveals about itself, generically, as well as how it announces at the outset that it will be a play *about* death. What separates *the* winter's tale from the commonplace saying is that Shakespeare's tale is not "merry"; *The Winter's Tale* announces that it will dramatize death's "tale," death's story, death's art. The possessive "Winter's" of its title signals this; winter represents death in ways related to infertility, hibernation, withdrawal. (p. 444)

Indeed, death is not only in the play's title but in its plot as well. Mamilius dies; Hermione allegedly dies after looking death in the eye (being tried and condemned); Antigonus is killed by a bear; and Perdita is found alive after being presumed dead. But "death and rebirth establish

equilibrium" (Burnette, 2016, p. 446) in this play, so the themes of redemption and resurrection (i.e. rebirth) are also very close to *The Winter's Tale*. "Even a cursory comparison of the story line of *The Winter's Tale* with that of its source, Greene's *Pandosto* (1588), reveals just how strongly Shakespeare was seeking to underline the idea of redemption" (Grantley, 1986, p. 18) in the play. At the end of *Pandosto*, the eponymous protagonist, who had previously lost his wife, commits suicide after discovering that he had lusted for his long-lost daughter. The plot of *The Winter's Tale* differs greatly from that of *Pandosto.* Leontes is redeemed by finding Perdita, and Hermione is miraculously restored. Obviously, "Shakespeare does not allow this tragedy to occur" (Grantley, 1986, p. 18).

The plot of Shakespeare's play is as follows: Leontes accuses Hermione of adultery and treason; he puts her in jail; his son Mamilius dies of concern for his mother; Leontes banishes his newborn daughter; and Hermione is sentenced and allegedly dies. After realising his mistakes, he spends the following sixteen years repenting and mourning and will be redeemed by his daughter and miraculously united with his wife. Thus, it can be said that he resembles Cymbeline in his short-sightedness and cruelty in the first part of the play, but he also resembles Pericles in his repentance from Act 3 to the play's end. After realising what he has done, Leontes swears that he will visit the chapel where his wife and son lie and shed tears as long as he lives (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 3.2.237–242). In this sense, he is very similar to Pericles, who also experiences depression, catatonia or Kristevan asymbolia. Daryll Grantley (1986) notes, he is a static figure in the camp of *penitentia*. Our interest in Leontes is not so much psychological as moral; his move from wrath to penitence is one of the most important factors that make possible the redemption and reconciliation at the conclusion of the play. (p. 23)

Leontes will eventually be redeemed by his banished daughter and wife, both of whom share numerous traits with the Virgin Mary. In the article "Bliss Unrevealed: The 'Trial' in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale,*" Paul A. Kottman (2021) draws parallels between the character of Hermione and that of the Virgin Mary: for a start, like Mary, Hermione's

conception is a matter of some speculation and concern—although it is not portrayed as immaculate. Like Mary, Hermione's love for her children is maternal—but it is also perhaps rooted in sexual love for a man. Like Mary, Hermione will grieve the loss of her son—but she will also grieve for a daughter. (p. 185)

However, unlike her predecessors, Marina, Thaisa and Imogen – the Virgin Mary figures – Hermione is pregnant. Her pregnant body is understood as a site of threat and irony. As such, it threatens to mar Leontes's and Polixenes's fantasy of parthenogenesis which Polixenes refers to at the beginning of the play (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 1.2.1–8).

Janet Adelman (1992) analyses this speech in detail: "'Nine changes,' 'watery star,' 'burden,' 'fill'd up,': in Polixenes's lines, anxieties about indebtedness and separation are registered through the imagery of pregnancy, as though Hermione's body provided the language for the rupture in their brotherhood" (p. 220). Leontes adds to Polixenes's fantasy by comparing them to innocent "twinn'd lambs that did frisk i' th' sun" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d,1.2.67) and regrets them not pursuing that life. Hermione interrupts this verbal, pastoral fantasy not just physically (by standing between the two "brothers") but also verbally as she comments: "By this we gather / You have tripp'd since" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d,1.2.73–74), and Polixenes situates the cause of this downfall in the female:

> *O my most sacred lady,*
> *Temptations have since then been born to's: for*
> *In those unfledg'd days was my wife a girl;*
> *Your precious self had not yet cross'd the eyes*
> *Of my young play-fellow. (Shakespeare,*
> *1623/1996d,1.2.76–80)*

As Valerie Traub (2014) argues, "Hermione's pregnant body, as much as it is the signifier of maternal fecundity and hereditary lineage, is a palpable remainder of erotic activity. To Leontes, her pregnancy visually represents the consequences of heterosexual intercourse" (p. 44). Thus, Hermione's destruction starts in the first act. Leontes accuses her of being a bad mother: "Give me the boy: – I am glad you did not

nurse him" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d,1.2.56). He also calls her an adulteress (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d,2.1.78 and 2.1.88) and a traitor (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 2.1.89). However, Hermione responds patiently in the manner of a Virgin Mother: "There's some ill planets reigns / I must be patient till the heavens look / With an aspect more favourable" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 2.1.104–106). In the trial scene, Hermione again shows patience: "Sir, You speak a language that I understand not: / my life stands in the level of your dreams, / Which I'll lay down" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 3.2.78–80), but also a Virgin-like prudence: "Sir, spare your threats: / the bug with which you would fright me with I seek. / To me can life be no commodity" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 3.2.91–93). She then refers to the loss of Leontes' affection, the loss of her children, the loss of her reputation and the fact that she was "the child-bed privilege denied, which 'longs / to women of all fashion" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 3.2.103–104). However, the most Virgin-like Hermione becomes is in Antigonus's dream, which he recounts to baby Perdita:

> *Come, poor babe: –*
> *I have heard,—but not believed,—the spirits*
> *o'the dead*
> *May walk again: if such thing be, thy mother*
> *Appear'd to me last night; for ne'er was dream*
> *So like a waking. To me comes a creature,*
> *Sometimes her head on one side, some another;*
> *I never saw a vessel of like sorrow,*
> *So fill'd and so becoming: in pure white robes;*
> *Like very sanctity, she did approach*
> *My cabin where I lay; thrice bow'd before me;*
> *And, gasping to begin some speech, her eyes*
> *Became two spouts … (Shakespeare,*
> *1623/1996d, 3.2.15–26)*

The plot and thus our attention at this moment shift from Hermione to Leontes and the story of Perdita. Act 5 depicts Leontes's penance. Cleomenes tells him that he had done enough penance, almost like a saint (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 5.1.1–4). Leontes responds by praising

Hermione: "Whilst I remember her and her virtues, I cannot forget / My blemishes in them; and so still think of / The wrong I did myself" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 5.1.7–9). Paulina highlights her virtues even more (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 5.1.13–16, 34-35). Leontes's and Paulina's remembrance functions much in the same way as "the revelation by oracle of her innocence, her subsequent 'death' and her apparition in a dream to Antigonus," i.e. it functions "to transform her from a human character to a saintly symbol of wronged innocence and thus to prepare us for her role in the final scene as a figure of grace and forgiveness" (Grantley, 1986, p. 23).

This brings us to the resurrection scene, which G. Wilson Knight (1958/2002) deemed "the most strikingly conceived and profoundly penetrating moment in English literature" (The Shakespearian Integrity section, part IV). Even though the final scene is the classical romance family reunion scene, it is obvious that "Shakespeare clearly has something else in mind for the ending of this romance; it will not end 'like an old tale' but in some other way" (Stier, 2018, p. 164). Paulina shows the statue by saying, "prepare / to see life as lively mockt as ever / Still sleep mockt death: behold, and say 'tis well" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 5.3.17–19). Upon seeing the statue, Leontes is first mesmerised by its naturalness ("Her natural posture!" [Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 5.3.23]) and then remembers Hermione's true nature:

> *Chide me, dear stone, that I may say indeed*
> *Thou art Hermione; or rather, thou art she*
> *In thy not chiding, for she was as tender*
> *As infancy and grace. (Shakespeare,*
> *1623/1996d, 5.3.23–26).*

For sixteen years, Hermione was considered dead not just by Leontes and the other characters in the play but also by the audience (which is not the case with the female characters in *Pericles* and *Cymbeline* who are present on stage even when presumed dead by the protagonists). In order for her to come back to life, Paulina tells everyone "It is required / You do awake your faith" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 5.3.92–93). Paulina

then calls for music (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 5.3.97) and commands Hermione's statue to descend and approach (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 5.3.98–99). Hermione's coming back to life, according to Barber and Wheeler (1986), resembles "a medieval miracle when a statue of the Holy Mother moves in response to prayer" (p. 333). Leontes embraces her: "O, she's warm!" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 5.3.109) and "She hangs about his neck" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 5.3.112). Even though it is obvious she is alive, Camillo comments: "If she pertain to life, let her speak too" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 5.3.113) but Hermione speaks only after she is reunited with her daughter, Perdita.

For Grantley (1986), Perdita is "a Christ-like figure" (p. 34) whereas Carol T. Neely (1985) sees her as "Hermione's double" (p. 201). Both critics seem to be correct because Perdita does display Christ-like features but so does Hermione. Grantley (1986) argues, "that she is an important part of the redemptive process is evident first because she, like her mother is associated with grace" (p. 24). She is also the epitome of suffering and injustice caused, at first, by her father who calls her a brat (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 2.3.92) and a bastard on several occasions (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 2.3.73, 75), and even considers murdering her (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 2.3.137–138). Later, Perdita will again be unjustly judged: this time by Polixenes, who opposes his son Florizel's falling in love with her. He calls her a "fresh piece / Of excellent witchcraft" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 4.3.427–428) and an "enchantement, / worthy enough a herdsman" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 4.3.440–441).

Perdita's destiny is hinted at early on in the play, immediately upon birth. Again, her destiny is connected to her mother's destiny. Emilia says,

> *A daughter, and a goodly babe,*
> *Lusty, and like to live: the queen receives*
> *Much comfort in't; says, 'My poor prisoner,*
> *I am innocent as you.' (Shakespeare,*
> *1623/1996d, 2.2.26–29)*

Later, Antigonus draws a similar conclusion: "poor wretch, / that, for thy mother's fault, art thus exposed / To loss and what may follow!" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 3.3.49–51) and "thou'rt like to have / A lullaby too rough" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 3.3.54–55). Perdita is associated with innocence and sainthood from her very birth:

even when she is a baby Paulina attempts to use her mere presence as "pure innocence" to cure the sin of the king (II.ii.39-42). If Hermione grows into an allegorical role, Perdita is thus more or less in one from the start. (Grantley, 1986, p. 24).

As an adult, Perdita shows boldness and soundness. She responds to Polixenes's threats in the manner of a "scriptural exemplum" (Grantley, 1986, p. 35) and claims that she "was not much afeard" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 4.3.449). She even equates Polixenes's kingly status to her status of shepherdess:

> *I was about to speak, and tell him plainly,*
> *The selfsame sun that shines upon his court*
> *Hides not his visage from our cottage, but*
> *Looks on alike. (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d,*
> *4.3.450–453)*

She is further depicted as the epitome of virtue, both physical and moral. The Gentleman who announces the coming of Florizel and Perdita says that she is "the fairest I have yet beheld" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 5.1.85) and "Ay, the most peerless piece of earth, I think, / That e'er the sun shone bright on" (Shakespeare, 1623/1996d, 5.1.94–95). As such, like Marina and Imogen before her, she is capable of redeeming her father.

However, and notably so, the scene of the father-daughter reunion in *The Winter's Tale* is not shown on stage. It is "entirely narrated, and in prose. … Like the Second Gentleman, to whom these events are narrated, we have been deprived of 'a sight which was to be seen, cannot be spoken of' (5.2.41–42)" (Stier, 2018, p. 164). The reason why Shakespeare elaborated on similar scenes in his two previous plays but did not do so in *The Winter's Tale* may lie in the importance of the scene of

Hermione's resurrection. Indeed, "from the beginning of his career to the end no one, with the possible exception of Hermione, is resurrected on stage" (Benson, 2009, p. 28). Thus, not presenting the father-daughter reunion on stage might be intentional, not to mar the importance of the scene of Hermione's statue coming to life.

Conclusion

Shakespeare's last tragedy, *King Lear*, ends with Lear's desperate desire that Cordelia lives but due to the conventions of tragedy, she dies. However, in the romances, resurrection becomes an essential motif, primarily accomplished through the medium of femininity, i.e. through the redemptive potential of female characters such as Marina and Thaisa in *Pericles*, Imogen in *Cymbeline* and Hermione and Perdita in *The Winter's Tale*. They are able to redeem their erring husbands and fathers from the states of mock death, an act which can be interpreted as a resurrection. As such, they emulate a figure that was popular in the Middle Ages and the early modern period, the Virgin Mary/Mother. Despite marginalisation, the Virgin was constantly present in people's lives and culture and moreover, was and still is very often perceived as the mother to all mankind and mankind's redemptrix. The four romance characters embody the motherly and virginal traits of forgiveness, patience, obedience and chastity and as such, flawless daughters, mothers and wives, are able to redeem their erring male counterparts.

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